

who work for companies that are dropping health insurance. So I think we ought to keep working on these things. I certainly don't think we ought to give up. I do think you'll see the numbers improve with children over the next 2 years.

I think that if we pass Kennedy-Jeffords, which I think we will, you'll see that improving. But we need the Medicaid buy-in and the Medicare buy-in for the older people and more States could solve this problem. We could give them the money through Medicaid waivers to let lower income working people buy into that. All those would make a big difference.

Let me also finally say I'm glad to see that this has become a source of discussion in the Presidential campaign for the Democrats, and I'm proud that the candidates in my party are trying to do something about it, and I hope that we will continue to see this debated. But these numbers confirm exactly what the First Lady said in '94, and we have some specific things we can do about it if the Congress and the States will help, and I hope they will.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:02 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Departure for the Pentagon and an Exchange With Reporters

October 5, 1999

Patients' Bill of Rights

The President. Good afternoon. I am delighted to be joined this afternoon by Secretary Shalala, Secretary Herman, and leaders of some of our Nation's top health, consumer, and provider organizations, including Dr. Thomas Reardon of the American Medical Association; Beverly Malone, the president of American Nurses Association; Judy Lichtman, the president of the National Partnership for Women and Families; John Seffrin, the CEO of the American Cancer Society; and Ron Pollack, the president of Families USA.

Before I leave for the Pentagon to sign legislation to enhance our national security,

I want to say a few words about legislation to enhance the security of patients and the health of our families.

Tomorrow the House is set to begin the long-awaited debate on the Patients' Bill of Rights. We are here today to urge Congress to act responsibly and pass strong, enforceable, bipartisan legislation to protect working families with the real health care protections they sorely need.

We have had enough of tragic stories from every corner of our land, families forced to switch doctors in the middle of pregnancy or cancer treatment, parents whose children had to bypass one or more emergency rooms before they received care, Americans who saw their loved ones die when their health plans overruled a doctor's urgent recommendations. The fact is Americans who are battling illness shouldn't have to also battle insurance companies for the coverage they need.

Our administration has done everything we could to protect patients. Through executive action, we've granted all of the safeguards in the Patients' Bill of Rights to more than 85 million Americans who get their health care through Federal plans. This past week I announced we'll publish rules to extend similar patient protections to every child covered under the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Many States are also making progress. But no State law, no executive action, can do what Congress alone has the power to achieve. Only Federal legislation can assure that all Americans, in all plans, get the patient protections they need and deserve.

Congressmen Charlie Norwood and John Dingell have a bill to do just that. It's a bipartisan Patients' Bill of Rights that would guarantee Americans the right to see the medical specialist they need, the right to emergency care wherever and whenever a medical crisis arises, the right to stay with a health care provider throughout a program of treatment, the right to hold a health plan accountable for harmful decisions.

But before Americans can be assured these fundamental rights, the Norwood-Dingell bill must be assured a fundamental right of its own, and that's the right to be offered on the House floor, with a straight

up or down vote. No legislative poison pills. No weakening amendments. No parliamentary sleights of hand.

Let's be clear: This is about more than congressional rules or legislative prerogatives. It's about providing Americans basic rights. It's about making sure medical professionals are able to do their jobs, about providing families with the quality care they deserve, and above all, about putting patients' interests above special interests. That's what all of us standing here and our allies in both parties in the House of Representatives are committed to.

Now, I'm told this morning some Republican leaders sat down with insurance company lobbyists who are fighting to defeat a strong Patients' Bill of Rights. On the eve of this vote, I'd like to ask them to think about sitting down with America's families instead.

This is not a partisan issue anywhere in the United States except Washington, DC. The legislation that we endorse has the endorsement of more than 300 health care and consumer groups across America, including groups where I would imagine most of the members are in the Republican Party.

The support for this legislation across America is broad and deep. We cannot allow a small group in Congress, representing a large, well-financed special interest, to thwart the will of doctors, nurses, medical professionals, and working families. We can't allow some parliamentary trick to litter this bill up like a Christmas tree and then have people vote for it to give people the impression they are for the Patients' Bill of Rights, when they are, in fact, against it.

So again, I ask Republican leaders to be straight with the American people. Instead of watered-down provisions, just give the people an up or down vote. Let the will of the people prevail. Let them see where every Member of the House stands on this profoundly important issue. Let's have a fair vote. If we have a fair vote, there will be a bipartisan majority for the Patients' Bill of Rights in the House of Representatives that reflects the overwhelming bipartisan, even nonpartisan, feeling for it out in the United States of America.

Thank you very much.

Medicare Reform

Q. Mr. President, do you believe after meeting with Senator Roth today that you'll get a competent Medicare reform program this year? And where might you be willing to compromise to get that?

The President. Well, first of all, I had a very good meeting with him, and I'm going to put out a statement about it. We talked about Medicare reform. He and Senator Moynihan assured me they're still committed to that and will work on it in a timely fashion. They also talked to me about the need to restore some of the restrictions or cuts in funding from the '97 Balanced Budget Act to some of the medical providers. I strongly agree with that, and I think we should do it.

We talked about some trade issues, the importance of the research and experimentation tax credit, and a number of other issues that I think are quite important that affect all Americans. So we had a good meeting, and I prepared and signed off on a statement which goes into greater detail about it.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Q. Mr. President, do you think you could try to postpone the vote on the treaty?

The President. On the test ban treaty?

Q. Yes.

The President. Well, let me say this: I think for the Senate to reject it would send a terrible message. It would say to the whole world, "Look, America's not going to test, but if you want to test, go right ahead. We're not interested in leading the world toward nonproliferation anymore."

I'm going to have a dinner tonight and talk to a number of Senators about it. I think a lot of thoughtful Republicans who normally support us in matters like this are, number one, under enormous political pressure not to do so, and number two, have the legitimate feeling that this very important issue, which in previous Congresses would have received 8, 10, 12 days of hearings, a week or more of debate, is for some reason being rushed at an almost unprecedented pace.

So we're going to talk through this. I'm going to make the best case I can. I'm going to tell them why I think it's in the national

interest. But I think it is a very curious position that some of the leaders of the opposite party are taking that they don't really want us to start testing again, and they know we have the most sophisticated system in the world for maintaining our nuclear stockpile without testing, but they don't want to vote for this treaty even if that says to Pakistan, to India, to China, to Russia, to Iran, to everybody else, you all go on and do whatever you want to do, but we're not going to do it. I think that's a very curious thing to do and would be very, very damaging to the interests of the United States and, even more important, to the safety of children in the 21st century all across the world.

We have been a leader for nonproliferation, including for the concept of a test ban treaty since the time of Dwight Eisenhower. He's the first person who recommended this. And before this Congress, it would have been unthinkable that a treaty of this kind, with these protections—particularly with the strengthening reservations that I have offered to work with Congress to put in—it would have been unthinkable before this Congress that such a treaty would not pass. So I'm going to work and do the best I can, and we'll see what happens.

Q. Sir, there seems to be the compliance, it cannot be verified, and that the integrity of the arsenal cannot be maintained absolutely—

The President. Well, I would like to respond to those two things. Number one, on the compliance issue, keep in mind what the reports say—that you cannot, with 100 percent certainty, detect small nuclear tests everywhere in the world. That's all they say. Our national security people, including all of our people at the Pentagon, say that any test of the magnitude that would present any sort of threat to the United States could, in fact, be detected, number one.

Number two, if we don't pass this treaty, such smaller tests will be even more likely to go undetected. Why? Because if the treaty goes into force, we'll have over 300 sophisticated sensors put out in places all across the world, and we'll have the right to onsite in-

spection, and we will also have the deterrent effect of people being found violating the treaty. Now, if you don't put the treaty into force, no sensors, no onsite inspections, no deterrent, and if the United States walks away from it, the rest of the world will think they've been given a green light. So I think that argument has literally no merit, because nothing changes except our ability to increase our determination of such tests with the passage of the treaty.

Now, on the first argument—the idea that, some say, we can't with absolute 100 percent certainty maintain the integrity of the stockpiles—that is not what the people who lead the energy labs say. That's not what the Joint Chiefs say. Some people disagree—they do. They say they're not sure that forever-and-a-day we'll be able to do that. I have offered the Senate a reservation to the treaty which makes it clear that if ever there comes a time we think we can't preserve the integrity of our nuclear stockpile, we can take appropriate steps to do so, number one.

Number two, we spend \$4.5 billion a year, with by far the most sophisticated system in the world, to maintain that. Now, if all the—this treaty doesn't go into effect unless all the nuclear powers and several dozen other countries agree to it; 44 in total must agree. If they all agree, I'm sure that all the people who are making this argument would acknowledge that our system of maintaining the integrity of our stockpile without tests is far in advance of what anybody else has. So our relative security will be increased, regardless.

Final point I want to make: None of these people will stand up and say, let's start testing again. So what they're saying is, "Okay, America won't test, but if everybody else tests, well, so be it." I think it would be a big mistake.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:13 p.m. in the South Portico at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas R. Reardon, president, American Medical Association; and Ronald F. Pollack, executive director, Families USA.

**Remarks on Signing the National
Defense Authorization Act for
Fiscal Year 2000**

October 5, 1999

Thank you very much, Secretary Cohen, for your remarks, your leadership, and for the depth of your concern for our men and women in the military.

Secretary Richardson, Secretary West, Deputy Secretary Hamre, General Shelton, General Ralston, Senior Master Sergeant Hall—he told me today this is the fourth time we’ve met, and the first time in Washington, DC. I’ve tried to get around to see people like the senior master sergeant in uniform in the Middle East and Asia and elsewhere.

I want to thank all those who serve them: the senior service chiefs, the service secretaries, the senior enlisted advisers. I’d also like to say a special word of thanks to all the Members of Congress here, too numerous to recognize them all. But I do want to acknowledge the presence of Senator Warner, Senator Levin, Senator Thurmond, Senator Robb, Senator Allard, Representative Spence and Representative Skelton, and the many other Members of the House of Representatives here today.

This, for me, more than anything else, is a day to say thank you; thank you for recognizing the urgent needs and the great opportunities of our military on the edge of a new century.

Today should be a proud day for men and women in uniform, not only here in this audience but all around the world. Time and again, they have all delivered for our country. Today America delivers for them.

In a few moments, I will have the privilege of signing the National Defense Authorization Act. As you have already heard, it provides for a strong national defense and a better quality of life for our military personnel and their families. It builds on the bipartisan consensus that we must keep our military ready, take care of our men and women in uniform, and modernize our forces.

Today, we have about 1.4 million men and women serving our country on active duty, doing what needs to be done from Korea to Kosovo, to Bosnia, to Iraq, to helping our neighbors in the hemisphere and in Turkey

dig out from natural disasters, to simply giving us confidence that America is forever strong and secure.

We ask our men and women in uniform to endure danger and hardship, and you do; to suffer separation from your families, and you endure that. We ask you to be the best in the world, and you are. In return, you ask very little. But we owe you the tools you need to do the job and the quality of life you and your families deserve.

This bill makes good on our pledge to keep our Armed Forces the best equipped and maintained fighting force on Earth. It carries forward modernization programs, funding the F-22 stealth fighter, the V-22 Osprey, the Comanche helicopter, advanced destroyers, submarines, amphibious ships, command and control systems, and a new generation of precision munitions. The bill also recognizes that no matter how dazzling our technological dominance, wars still will be won today and tomorrow as they have been throughout history, by people with the requisite training, skill, and spirit to prevail.

The excellence of our military is the direct product of the excellence of our men and women in uniform. This bill invests in that excellence. It authorizes, as you have already heard, a comprehensive program of pay and retirement improvements that add up to the biggest increase in military compensation in a generation. It increases bonuses for enlistment and reenlistment, and provides incentives needed to recruit and retrain our military personnel.

I would like to say a special word of appreciation to all the members of our military, including a lot of enlisted personnel, who have discussed these issues with me over the last 2 or 3 years, in particular. And I would like to thank the Members of Congress not only for the work they did on the pay issue but also on the retirement issue. And I’d like to say a special word of appreciation on that to Congressman Murtha, who first talked to me about it, and I know labored very hard on it.

Now, an awful lot of people worked to make this bill a reality. And I’m glad that there are so many members of both parties of the House and the Senate Armed Services Committee here today. I also want to thank